

June 5, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
United State Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of the 28 undersigned organizations, we write to request that you include emergency supplemental funding for the National Institute for Diabetes, Digestive, and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) in the next COVID-19 relief package. Our members thank you for the funding that you have already provided to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), including several of its institutes and centers, to respond to this public health emergency. However, NIDDK has not received any emergency funding, and we cannot truly understand COVID-19 and its health effects without appropriating funds to this institute to conduct COVID-19 related research on scientific areas within its mission.

As clinicians and researchers respond to this pandemic, our understanding of COVID-19 continues to evolve. What we originally understood to be an infectious, respiratory virus, we now know has effects beyond how it attacks patients' lung many of which involve conditions studied by NIDDK. Those infected with the virus are presenting with acute gastrointestinal syndrome with nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea and acute kidney injury when they had no underlying chronic kidney disease (CKD). Patients also are experiencing hematologic complications, including coagulation and hematopoietic dysfunction. COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting individuals with comorbid conditions, like diabetes, obesity, liver disease, and CKD. These chronic conditions are more prevalent in minority populations placing them at higher risk to COVID-19 as the early data show. We also know that having one of these underlying conditions effects virus progression and patient outcomes. Yet, without additional funding, NIDDK will be forced to divert funds from its existing priorities to better under these characteristics of COVID-19.

We must understand the unique aspects of how the virus presents and progresses in patients with the comorbid conditions NIDDK is charged with studying to help clinicians treat patients with COVID-19 as well as to prepare for the next wave of this virus. With dedicated funding, NIDDK will be able to support research to understand how obesity



drives diabetes-related COVID-19 complications, the underlying risk factors for hematopoietic dysfunction that contribute to severe COVID-19 infection, as well as the risks the virus poses to and how to most effectively treat patients with other comorbid conditions. These funds would also support therapeutic and vaccine studies to evaluate which are appropriate for use in patients with these chronic conditions.

Examples of COVID-19 related research that would fall within NIDDK's scope were highlighted in the institute's recent Notice of Special Interest and include:

- Collection of biosamples that could inform the pathogenesis of COVID-19-associated kidney, gastrointestinal, or endocrine/metabolic diseases.
- Studies to gather data from health care systems and ongoing clinical trials to better understand whether patients with COVID-19 and diseases in the mission of NIDDK have different outcomes based on underlying disease factors or therapies for their condition.
- Studies to identify risk factors that could lead to modification of therapy in high-risk individuals such as patients with AKI, organ transplantation, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, and other diseases within the mission of NIDDK that are treated with immunomodulators or biologic pathway inhibitors.
- Studies to identify novel pathogenic pathways and potential translational targets for the development of kidney, gastrointestinal, and endocrine/metabolic diseases associated COVID-19 infection using relevant in vitro and in vivo studies of the kidney, gastrointestinal, and endocrine/metabolic system.
- Pilot clinical studies designed to understand the natural history of COVID-19-related AKI and gastrointestinal or endocrine/metabolic diseases or to evaluate interventions to prevent or treat COVID-19-induced AKI, digestive or endocrine/metabolic disorders.

Without additional funding, NIDDK will not have the capacity to continue adequately supporting existing research projects while also undertaking new research on COVID-related complications and comorbidities that will be critical both for disease mitigation and the development of effective treatments and vaccines. Therefore, we respectfully request that Congress appropriate funds to NIDDK to do this important research in the next COVID-19 response legislation.

Sincerely,

Alagille Syndrome Alliance  
American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases  
American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy  
American Gastroenterological Association  
American Kidney Fund  
American Liver Foundation



American Psychological Association  
American Society Nephrology  
American Society of Hematology  
American Society of Pediatric Nephrology  
American Urological Association  
ASBMR  
Beyond Celiac  
Cooley's Anemia Foundation  
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation  
Digestive Disease National Coalition  
Endocrine Society  
Global Liver Institute  
JDRF  
National Certification Board for Diabetes Educators  
National Pancreas Foundation  
NephCure Kidney International  
North American Society for Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition  
Nutrition and Medical Foods Coalition  
Pediatric Endocrinology Nursing Society  
Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates, Inc.  
The American Liver Foundation  
The Simon Foundation for Continence